

El papiamento, lengua criolla hispánica. By Dan Munteanu, con la colaboración de Sidney M. Joubert. Madrid: Gredos, 1996. Pp. 518. Paper, 3,200 Ptas.

Reviewed by Silvia Kouwenberg, *University of the West Indies at Mona*

What to think of an author whose name most readers of this journal probably see mentioned for the first time, who accuses creolists of having lost sight of two fundamental principles of modern linguistics: that language is structured, and that language is a social phenomenon (p. 119)?¹ Munteanu's position in the periphery of creolistics — previous publications have been in journals and series such as *Studii și Cercetaări Lingvistice* (Bucarest), *Anuario de Letras* (México), *Anuario de Lingüística Hispánica* (Valladolid), *Bulletin de la Société Roumaine de Linguistique Romane*, more often than not in Rumanian — is betrayed by his somewhat naive interpretations of creolist positions throughout the book. As a result, it is likely to be more appealing to a non-specialist audience, which will find in it a discussion of polygenesis and monogenesis (with a view toward Spanish-based creoles), a brief history and characterization of the Netherlands Antilles and of the position of Papiamento in the ABC Islands, a discussion of the controversy pertaining to the original Iberian base of Papiamento (Portuguese or Spanish) (all Part 1),

¹ The original quote follows:

“Por un inexplicable descuido, se perdieron de vista dos ideas fundamentales de lingüística moderna, a saber:

a) la lengua es una estructura...;
b) la lengua es un fenómeno social.” (p. 119)

a description of aspects of Papiamentu phonology and morphosyntax in relation to Spanish (Part 2), and a collection of texts (Part 3). On the other hand, that audience already had available to it Munteanu (1991), of which this is an expanded version — a fact which is not mentioned anywhere. The main benefit of M's latest publication for a creolist audience is that it makes available in published form a (biased) discussion of the arguments for a Portuguese or Spanish basis of Papiamentu, and reviews some 17th-century and dialectal properties of Spanish; earlier work in this area is unpublished (e.g., Andersen, 1974), or out of print (e.g., Lenz, 1928; Maduro, 1966). The main goal of the book appears to be to convince its readership that Papiamentu grammar can be described as Spanish-derived. M does not exclude Portuguese influence altogether, but points out that within the Jewish community — which is generally held responsible for any Portuguese influence — many may have spoken Spanish rather than Portuguese, and that seemingly Portuguese-derived features may just as well be traced to Spanish dialects. M thus turns Portuguese-speaking Jews into passive bystanders in the genesis of Papiamentu, while placing speakers of vernacular varieties of Spanish in the center of this development. Note also that while the evidence is strong that Spanish was spoken in the ABC islands, M fails to offer evidence that the particular vernacular varieties that he is concerned with were indeed present. With respect to the role of West African languages in the genesis of Papiamentu, M believes that the influence which a language exercises on others depends on "el grado de cultura y civilización representado por dicha lengua" (p. 136). Obviously, the West African languages were no match for Spanish in this context. M seems to see their role as limited to inducing certain internal evolutionary tendencies of Spanish; their exact identity is therefore hardly relevant (p. 137). As regards the development which takes us from Spanish to Papiamentu, M supports the (outdated) Jakobsonian postulate that a language (here: Spanish) accepts "foreign" (here: African) elements only where these correspond to its internal evolutionary tendencies, but contradicts himself where he claims that some African features were maintained in creole languages, viz. those which have a strong "psychological reality" — a concept which is not further explained — as these would have been impervious to other (here: Spanish) influences (p. 146). Examples of such features include preverbal particles, the dual function of *nan* as a third person plural pronoun and plural marker, reduplications, serial verb constructions, the emphatic particle *ta*, some phrasal expressions, and the functions of the

definite article. This catalogue of African-derived features reads like similar lists in substratist publications, where it is also often assumed that it is not necessary to know just exactly which substrate languages were most relevant to creole genesis. Now widely accepted criticism of substratist work of this sort is therefore equally applicable to M's study.

The title of Part 2, *Descripción del papiamento*, is somewhat misleading, as it is limited to a description of Papiamento forms and their functions in terms of their relation to their Spanish etyma. M's preoccupation with Papiamento's Spanish roots leads him, for example, to pay more attention to the vowel and consonant systems of Papiamento (72 pages) than to the verbal system (44 pages), to discuss the Papiamento consonant system in terms of phonemes which do not exist in modern Spanish (pp. 230–239) and those which do (pp. 240–245), and to pay considerable attention to changes of consonants as compared to Spanish (pp. 245–258). At the same time he entirely overlooks the subject of the phonotactic distribution of consonants in Papiamento.

The sections on morphosyntax similarly reflect M's bias. Thus, the section on nouns opens with a discussion of gender (pp. 263–266), which is a morphological property of Spanish, but not of Papiamento. In general, M pays scant attention to construction types which are not easily relatable to Spanish, such as the serial verb construction, which is awarded only three pages (pp. 372–375), despite its importance in creole studies. For comparison, the subject of gender also receives three pages, and the subject of numerals (subdivided into cardinal numbers, ordinal numbers, fractions, and others), is discussed in a grand total of six pages. The description of Papiamento tone (pp. 182–189), which is based on work by M's collaborator Joubert, is exceptional in dealing in some detail with a non-Spanish property.

M's description could have gained considerably if he had recognized that it is possible to arrive at generalizations (after all, language *is* structured). Take, for instance, the rather lengthy section on number marking (pp. 266–276). The following is the author's attempt at explaining the obligatory absence of plural marking in certain contexts:

Podemos hablar, en cambio, de una influencia africana evidente, en este caso, si aceptamos que el hablante no siente la necesidad de marcar el plural mediante una desinencia específica al textualizar un plan global, es decir, en el nivel de la estructura superficial, porque en la estructura profunda, en su mente, el plural es evidente. (p. 271)

The author appears to have abandoned the description of Papiamento grammar here, to indulge instead in ruminations on the (African) speaker's state of mind. In case the author would like to return to grammar, Bickerton's (1981) "generic plural" or Mufwene's (1981) "nonindividuated" class seem particularly useful for the case discussed here (*nan ta bende buki ei* 'they sell books there'); if on the other hand, the author would like to go beyond speculative thoughts on cognition in relation to number, he could consult Lucy (1992).

Part 3 contains Papiamento texts with Spanish translations. An attempt has been made to achieve wide coverage by including poems, a folk tale, a letter, a short fragment from a novel, some texts taken from brochures and periodicals, and a paper by Römer. More than rudimentary knowledge of Papiamento is required to relate the texts to their Spanish translations, as literal glosses are not included; this holds also for examples quoted throughout the book. Furthermore, words which illustrate the occurrence of vowels and consonants in the phonology sections are not translated. No oral texts are included, which leads one to suspect that M's description of Papiamento is entirely based on secondary sources. Nowhere in the book is there any mention of independent fieldwork by the author, although his collaborator Joubert is a native speaker of Papiamento and is likely to have provided some of the examples.

A final remark concerns referencing. The section on the development and growth of the Papiamento language and literature (pp. 48–61) would have been more valuable had the discussion of literary production in Papiamento been referenced. Furthermore, references in the bibliography do not contain information on publishers.

To conclude: M's approach to the description of Papiamento grammar does more justice to his unexpressed intention to portray Papiamento as a Spanish-based language than to the grammar of Papiamento. Its usefulness for creolists follows less from its inherent merits than from the fact that to date, descriptions of Papiamento grammar are either unpublished (e.g., Birmingham, 1970), elementary (e.g., Goilo, 1972), fragmentary (e.g., Kouwenberg & Muysken, 1995), short (e.g., Kouwenberg & Murray, 1994), or restricted to certain aspects of Papiamento grammar (e.g., Dijkhoff, 1993; Maurer, 1988; Römer, 1991). Isn't it about time someone wrote a grammar of Papiamento?

References

- Andersen, R. (1974). *Nativization and hispanization in the Papiamentu of Curaçao, N.A.: A sociolinguistic study of variation*. Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin.
- Bickerton, D. (1981). *Roots of language*. Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma.
- Birmingham, J. C. (1970). *The Papiamentu language of Curaçao*. Dissertation, University of Virginia.
- Dijkhoff, M. B. (1993). *Papiamentu word formation*. Dissertation, University of Amsterdam.
- Goilo, E. T. (1972). *Papiamentu textbook*. 4th edition. Aruba: De Wit Stores.
- Kouwenberg, S., & Murray, E. (1994). *Papiamentu*. München: Lincom Europa.
- Kouwenberg, S., & Muysken, P. (1995). Papiamentu. In J. Arends, P. Muysken, & N. Smith (Eds.), *Pidgins and creoles. An introduction* (pp. 205–218). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Lenz, R. (1928). *El Papiamento, la lengua criolla de Curazao (la gramática más sencilla)*. Santiago de Chile: Imprenta Balcells.
- Lucy, J. A. (1992). *Grammatical categories and cognition: A case study of the linguistic relativity hypothesis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Maduro, A. J. (1966). *Procedencia di palabranan Papiamentu i otro anotacionnan*. Curaçao: privately printed.
- Maurer, P. (1988). *Les modifications temporelles et modales du verbe dans le papiamento de Curaçao (Antilles Néerlandaises)*. Hamburg: Helmut Buske.
- Mufwene, S. S. (1981). Non-individuation and the count/mass distinction. *Chicago Linguistic Society*, 17, 221–238.
- Munteanu, D. (1991). *El papiamento, origen, evolución y estructura*. Bochum: Universitätsverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer.
- Römer, R. G. (1991). *Studies in Papiamentu tonology*. Amsterdam and Kingston: University of Amsterdam and University of the West Indies.
